



21C to 700 B.C in a swipe: The Classics meet iPad

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The Tanya Jermaine collection of Greek vase reproductions was purchased by the Massey University School of History, Philosophy and Classics through an alumni donation in 2010. The collection was envisioned as a hands-on teaching resource for students to use and experiment with and proved to be the inspiration for a project aimed at mobilising the collection for a wider audience including distance students, high schools and the general public. Classics and the department of Museum Studies, supported by Centre for Teaching and Learning consultants, designed and created both physical and virtual exhibition spaces for the collection. One of the major drivers was to produce an engaging application that would replicate, at least in part, some of the tactile experiences that the vases provide to students in real life. After considering several options, a beta version of Adobe's Digital Publishing Suite was used to produce the mobile application.

Keywords: mobile technology, iPad, digital publishing, active learning.

Overview

A collection of Greek vase reproductions was purchased as a teaching resource by the School of History, Philosophy and Classics courtesy of an alumni donation in 2010.

It is a really special collection... It provides us with unique and accessible teaching tools, and is an asset to the University and the wider community. The advantage of having reproductions of these subjects means that our students can use them and experiment with them in a very practical and hands-on way, and this brings potential for their use in learning across multiple subject areas (Dr Gina Salapata, 2011)

As well as a physical on-site exhibition and storage space, a virtual online space was envisioned to maximize the potential of the collection as a teaching resource. One of the major reasons for purchasing the collection was the ability for students to actively handle and use the objects, often as part of role plays

in tutorials. The tactile, gesture-based operation of the iPad was seen as the most effective means to retain at least some of the hands-on experience of the collection enjoyed by internal students. A beta version of Adobe's Digital Publishing Suite (Adobe DPS) was tested and found to be a relatively swift and easy way to develop interactive content for iPad, Android and Blackberry tablets.

Benefits include:

- Adobe Creative Suite authoring – familiar tools that allow designers to create content with no programming skills required.
- An enhanced set of plug-ins for InDesign allowing fast creation of interactive content
- Output to Adobe's free Content Viewer
- Easy conversion/inclusion of print-based documents into mobile-ready applications
- Ability to commercialise and/or distribute content via iTunes

Issues:

- Relatively expensive proprietary software required to utilize the “free” DPS tools
- Expensive commercial publishing and distribution options for iTunes
- Text converted to images
- Difficult to integrate bespoke interactive content
- Expensive hardware
- Some navigation issues for inexperienced iPad users

The ability to create “3D”, rotatable objects was fully exploited. Several of the vases were placed on to a turntable and filmed in high definition at 60 frames per second using a digital SLR. This footage provided over 300 high quality stills per vase to produce smooth, seamless 360 degree animations. Students are able to control the vases and explore them more fully by swiping the surface of the iPad. Commentary on the iconography, production techniques, and the social and historical relevance of the vases and their decoration is provided through text and audio. The application was further enhanced with slideshows and the ability to flip between portrait and landscape modes for alternative imagery and content. An adapted Flash-based web version was produced for use in the learning management system and on the University website for those without access to the relevant hardware.

Lessons learned: Where's the educational value?

The potential to create a more deeply engaging educational experience is currently hampered by the lack of tools to easily allow for student response and reflection. In this instance, the application is seen as an enhancement as opposed to a core part of the course materials. Distance students benefit from more immersive interaction with the collection and the application can be used as a resource alongside the actual vases with internal students. Applications are more akin to multimedia enhanced print-based documents but work is underway to incorporate links to other web-based apps which students could then use to record observations or data, respond to questions, contribute video or photo logs etc. Adobe DPS iPad applications are now being conceived as a means to organise and deliver a student learning experience, particularly those which might occur in the field or on location, with the iPad and a pre-installed suite of applications used as the means to record, publish and share student collated data via the web using 3G. It is anticipated that authoring solutions will become more versatile as tablet technology matures.

Future development

Funding applications are already in progress to further develop the University's capability in this area. A collaborative project with a local museum is underway that is intended to graphically illustrate the social life of artefacts. The application will enable users to trace the origins of a particular object or art work and its subsequent journeys to, and then within, the museum. Emphasis is being placed on socio-cultural and geo-political contexts; archival, documentary and pictorial sources; and first person narrative. Production of the application is being recorded in detail and will itself provide a valuable learning opportunity for postgraduate students in Museum Studies. Another proposal is looking into the potential for using iPad applications to aid in

the facilitation and delivery of field trips for the Geography programme.

The University is currently pursuing a digital learning materials initiative designed to reduce print-based study materials in favour of digital distribution. The ability to relatively easily produce interactive, mobile ready content has great potential for electronic study materials as well as for non teaching related marketing materials, syllabuses and campus guides.

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